

Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction

Volume 16
Issue 2 *The Journal of ERW and Mine Action*

Article 29

July 2012

In Remembrance: Kaido Keerdo Estonian Demining Expert Killed in Libya

CISR JOURNAL

Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU (CISR)

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Recommended Citation

JOURNAL, CISR (2012) "In Remembrance: Kaido Keerdo Estonian Demining Expert Killed in Libya," *The Journal of ERW and Mine Action* : Vol. 16 : Iss. 2 , Article 29.

Available at: <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol16/iss2/29>

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In Remembrance: Kaido Keerdo


Estonian Demining Expert Killed in Libya

As efforts to clear landmines and other explosive remnants of war from Libya continue, international deminers risk their lives to eliminate the risks to people in the area. On 3 March 2012, a suspected Type 84 anti-tank mine, a Chinese-made cluster munition, killed civilian contractor Kaido Keerdo in Dafniya, 180 kilometers (112 miles) from the Libyan capital of Tripoli.^{1,2} Although Estonia's Government has not deployed any demining specialists to Libya,³ Estonian mine-expert Keerdo was working for DanChurchAid as a demining technician after having served six years with an explosive-ordnance disposal unit in the Estonian military.

On 1 March 2012, alleged in-fighting among Libyan militias caused a rocket-propelled grenade to strike a shipping container that housed munitions.¹ Hearing of the skirmish while traveling to a different clearance task, Keerdo and his team insisted that the site be evacuated, as one of the containers was still smoking.¹ Returning a day later, despite having the day off, Keerdo and his team assessed the area, found several Type 84 submunitions and surrounded the explosives with sandbags.¹ Whereas most anti-tank mines are buried by hand, the Type 84 AT mine is a scatterable cluster munition deployed via airborne rockets. It remains above ground, scatters submunitions over a wide area and relies on a magnetic fuze to detonate its internal explosive charge.¹ On 3 March 2012, Keerdo and his team returned to the site to determine how best to dispose of the explosives. Members of Keerdo's team say that he climbed to the roof of a nearby building to survey the area when, roughly 100 meters (328 feet) away, Keerdo's team heard an explosion and later found him dead.¹

Experts believe a Type 84 submunition is responsible for Keerdo's death, as his team previously saw submunitions and rocket carriers scattered in the vicinity of the exploded shipping container. Moreover, pieces of a detonated submunition were also found near Keerdo's body. DCA spokeswoman Helen Rits told *Agence France-Presse* that Keerdo was killed "disposing of a charge."³ Tragically, a few days prior, Keerdo was quoted as saying that he intended to leave the demining scene since he thought the work was too dangerous.¹

Although Keerdo had only worked with DCA for three months, he encountered the Type 84 before.¹ In January 2012, he found a Type 84 outside Dafniya, cordoned off the area and used explosives to detonate it. Incidentally, the explosion left the fuze of the mine intact.¹ Unable to determine whether the rocket carrier that was still attached to the mine carried additional submunitions, Keerdo and his team buried two large explosive charges in two trenches on opposing sides of the carrier and left a "crater" where the Type 84 mine had been.¹

Keerdo's death signifies the ongoing struggle to remove the landmines and ordnance remaining from Moammar Gadhafi's regime. Since the dictator's death, authorities within the Libyan National Transitional Council have requested foreign mine-action experts to help with clearance. Keerdo's death marks DCA's most serious casualty since two of DCA's international deminers were injured in Misrata in November 2011, also by a Type 84 submunition.¹ 

~ Blake Williamson, CISR staff

See endnotes page 83



Kaido Keerdo preparing UXO for destruction in Dafniyah, Libya.
Photo courtesy of Marcus Rhinelanders.